



DECOLONIZING CHAM SCULPTURES AS ART: FROM CULTURAL APPROPRIATION TO CULTURAL REVITALIZATION

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ABSTRACT

The Cham people, who are indigenous to present-day Vietnam, are often viewed as extinct. This is especially apparent when we consider the presentation of Cham sculptures as artwork in numerous museums worldwide. Cham sculptures, which are primarily based on Hindu and Buddhist depictions, are not presented as religious or spiritual cultural objects but as art. By displaying these cultural objects as art, it takes away the intended spiritual and cultural values and places the priority on the tourist gaze. Additionally, French and Vietnamese museums have come to culturally appropriate Cham cultural objects as part of their own respective colonial or cultural histories. This paper profiles several museums worldwide that have retained Cham cultural objects, discusses ways to decolonize these museums and exhibits, and offers some insight into revitalizing contemporary Cham culture.

Introduction

Many Asian nations do not recognize indigenous peoples as distinct, and often homogenizes indigenous peoples as ethnic minorities. Vietnam is no exception. There, Cham people are classified as one of Vietnam's fifty-four federally recognized ethnic minorities. Since the Cham are not federally recognized as indigenous in Vietnam, they are also not recognized as indigenous at the international level by the United Nations. The United Nations Declaration of Indigenous Peoples does not have a formal definition of 'indigenous.' However, it grants the respective nation-states the authority to recognize (or not) their own indigenous peoples. As such, Cham indigeneity is a contested issue.

The kingdom of Champa reigned over central and south present-day Vietnam from 192 CE to 1471 CE when the kingdom fell. The last Champa lands were annexed to Vietnam in 1832.[1] Despite the fall of the Champa kingdom, the ethnic Cham people continue to reside in parts of Vietnam. Although approximately 132,000 Cham people continue to reside in Vietnam, they are not regarded as significant.[2] This is evident as the Vietnamese government continues to homogenize ethnic minority groups to assimilate to Vietnamese society and culture.[3] I reiterate these points to support the Cham as an indigenous peoples: 1) the Cham are descendants of the Champa kingdom dating back to the second century CE, 2) they are now ethnic and religious minorities in the respective nation-states in which they reside in, and 3) because they are minorities, they are often

discriminated against and forced to assimilate to the dominant ethnic majority.

Many Native scholars attest to the common struggle that all indigenous peoples face – survival. Patrick Wolfe describes settler colonialism as an ongoing phenomenon, rather than a static event, “[colonial] invasion [should be] recognized as a structure rather than an event, its history does not stop...”[4] Wolfe argues that, “...settler colonialism destroys to replace.”[5] Additionally, Taiaiake Alfred and Jeff Corntassel argue that “contemporary settlers” push towards the extermination of culture through the erasure of land and history, thereby forcing indigenous peoples to assimilate into mainstream society.[6] Although there are a number of differences among indigenous peoples, Alfred and Corntassel maintain that all indigenous peoples face a common struggle to survive against colonization “...culturally, politically and physically.”[7] The Cham continue to fight for their survival in history and in the present-day as they are viewed as no longer living, extinct, or archaic. Ancient Cham culture is regarded as noteworthy and continues to be considered significant by Asian Studies and French scholars. However, Nguyen Thi Thu Huong states that, “While Cham objects are regarded as fine artworks and sculptures by scholars, and the Cham are considered the only builders of stone structures and sculptures of large classical objects like Hindu deities, they still remain unfamiliar to most of the general public.”[8] Therefore, the Cham are an invisible indigenous and ethnic minority group.

The Cham were highly influenced by Hinduism and as such, many of their sculptures represent the Hindu religion.[9] In the ninth century, Buddhism became popular among the Cham and in the seventeenth century, Islam became the major religion that the Cham followed.[10] The Vietnamese and French have come to appropriate Cham culture through Cham sculptures by claiming that these artifacts are part of their respective colonial and cultural histories. This paper will profile several museums and exhibits that have kept Cham sculptures in their vicinity. These cultural and religious objects are regarded as art and as such, are displayed as art in numerous museums and exhibits. This paper will also discuss the potential reasons behind this labeling, the issues of displaying Cham sculptures, and offer methods at decolonizing museums and exhibits.

Informal Indigenous Recognition and Colonial Attempts at Modernization

Approximately 86 million people live in Vietnam. Indigenous peoples in Vietnam are grouped with ethnic minorities and are often referred to as hill tribes people. There is no federal or formal distinction of indigenous peoples in Vietnam. In 1979, a “scientific method” was established to categorize and classify fifty-four ethnic groups in their nation. The majority ethnic group, who are ethnic Vietnamese people, are called the Kinh. The remaining fifty-three ethnic groups

are considered ethnic minorities and reside in mountainous or remote areas.[11]

In official wording indigenous peoples in Vietnam are referred to as ethnic minorities....The Government has defined ethnic minorities as ‘those people who have Vietnamese nationality, who live in Viet Nam but who do not share Kinh characteristics such as language, culture, and identity.’[12]

The fifty-four ethnic groups are separated into three linguistic families: Austro-Asian, Austronesian, and Sino-Tibetan. Two other forms of classification were used prior to 1979. In 1959, sixty-three groups were classified as ethnic groups.[13] In 1973, however, the number decreased to fifty-nine.[14] The decrease is reasoned to have come from the consolidation of two groups into one group, name changes of groups, and redefined group names.[15] Vietnam bifurcates major groups as those living in the plains and deltas and those living in the mountain regions.[16] Although there is no formal recognition of indigenous peoples, they are informally recognized and characterized as those who live in the upland, highland, or mountainous regions.

Among the 54 defined ethnic groups living in Vietnam, the majority – the Kinh, Khmer, Cham (except the Cham Hroi), Hoa and Ngai – usually prefer to inhabit lowland or coastal areas. The remaining 49 ethnic groups, plus a separate group of the Cham, the Cham Hroi, are designated as real hill tribes or hill people, living in the mountainous regions of the north and in the Central Highlands. The French called them ‘Montagnards’ (highlanders), the Vietnamese often refer to the hill peoples as ‘Moi,’ a derogatory word meaning ‘savages.’[17]

The fifty hill tribe groups were further divided into “... differences in dialects, tribal relationship, geographical location, altitude of settlement, social and political structure.”[18] Although hill tribes are often very different from each other, they do share a history of war between neighbors, the lifestyle of subsistence living, living in remote areas, and are tied to their cultural traditions, and as such, are reluctant to change.[19] While these differing groups have some similarities and differences, they are homogenized and categorized by the Vietnamese nation-state as ethnic minorities.

The Cham people living in the lowlands are in the state of limbo as they are (what I deem) semi-recognized by the Kinh. Since Champa was a large kingdom, many clans and tribes were established to distinguish between different Cham peoples. The Cham Hroi is one of these groups.

When the Champa kingdom came under full control of the Viet by the end of the seventeenth century, a small group split off the Cham society and withdrew into mountainous areas on the edge of the Central Highlands to become the Cham Hroi group. The Cham Hroi group was separately classified in the second classification of ethnic groups in 1973. But in the latest classification of 1979, the Cham Hroi are classified among the ethnic Cham people.[20]

Although the Cham Hroi is grouped with the larger Cham group by Vietnam, other groups such as the Ede, Raglai, and Cho Ru have been argued to be part of the original Cham peoples.

It has been surmised that the Ede, Raglai, Cham Hroi, and Cho Ru are of Cham origin, split off from Cham society into local groups towards

the end of the seventeenth century and withdrew into the highlands of central Vietnam, forming the tribes that exist today.[21]

More recent archaeological artifacts have argued against these three hill tribes being part of the larger Cham group.[22] However, both sides of the argument are debatable. Nevertheless, the examination of the Cham Hroi group is important as they may be classified as Cham in the larger group and be considered ethnic minorities, rather than informally recognized as indigenous peoples. The Cham Hroi and the larger Cham group have complicated the issue of indigeneity as they challenge the preconceived notions that indigenous peoples only live in the highlands and are primordial.

The label of primordial is problematic as it imposes certain characteristics among indigenous and nonindigenous peoples. Oscar Salemink explains that post-1975 ethnic classification in Vietnam follows a Marxist evolutionist theory in the former Soviet Union.[23] In Vietnam, this theory has created a hierarchy, which designates fixed inferior characteristics to ethnic minorities: “Ethnic minorities are increasingly seen as less advanced, less developed, and less civilized.”[24] Due to the ethnic minorities’ perceived inferior statuses, neo-Confucian principles establishes the Kinh to assume the paternalistic role of older sibling. The older sibling is supposed to help guide the uncivilized children (ethnic minorities) to become modern, evolved adults. Salemink argues that rituals performed by the Kinh reflect a Daoist aspect, rather than Confucian paternalism.[25] The Daoist

aspect incorporates the recognition of ethnic minorities as predecessors to the land before the Kinh's takeover, therefore making these ethnic minorities indigenous. The Kinh's recognition and respect for indigenous peoples may theoretically reclassify them as "contemporary ancestors." This reclassification establishes that there are indigenous peoples in Vietnam, as the Kinh are performing rituals to please these ancestors.

Cham Sculptures in Present-day Vietnam

While different scholars had their own methods of classifying sculptural styles, Jean-François Hubert has simplified them into seven styles: 1) the 6th to 7th centuries as Primary style, 2) the 7th to 8th centuries as My Son E1 style, 3) the 9th to 10th centuries as Dong Duong style, 4) the 10th century as Tra Kieu style, 5) the 10th to 11th centuries as Chien Dan style, 6) the 11th to 13th centuries as Thập Mam style, and 7) the 14th and 15th centuries as Yang Mum style. [26] The Thập Mam style refers to the region of Binh Dinh, which prospered from the eleventh to thirteenth centuries, [27] and "...is characterized by its monumentality and the use of big, broad surfaces as background for ecstatic patterning. While anthropomorphic images were found at the site [Binh Dinh], it is best known for its fantastic beasts." [28] An example of a "fantastic beast" is "Gajasimha," an elephant-lion. Many of the sculptures in the following museums have Thập Mam style and My Son sculpture styles.

The Da Nang Museum of Cham Sculpture in Vietnam is home to the largest collection of Cham sculptures. There are approximately 2,000 Cham sculptures that the museum possesses, of which 500 are on display in the museum and in an adjacent garden. More than 1,200 of the remaining sculptures are held in a storehouse with other objects including clothing, photographs, films, and digital discs. The sculptures date back from the seventh to fifteenth century and are made from several different materials including sandstone, terracotta, and bronze. [29] The museum itself was proposed in 1902 and erected in 1915 as the Musée Henri Parmentier. [30] Considering its French influence, the museum's building design borrows from French colonial architecture. [31]

The French became interested in Champa in 1885 when soldiers came into contact with the My Son sanctuary. [32] Vietnam was conquered by France and declared to be part of the Federation of Indochina in 1887. [33] The French established the Permanent Archaeological Mission to research their new territories in 1898; the organization was renamed École Française d'Extrême-Orient (French School of Oriental Far East – EFEO) in 1900. The French admired Cham objects so much so that they came to be viewed as artwork in some museums, like the EFEO. [34] The irony is that the EFEO Museum, later renamed the Louis Finot Museum, faced protests from the Vietnamese for being too "colonial." [35] As a result, the Museum tried to engage the Vietnamese community by changing the labels of text on objects from

French to Vietnamese. Once Vietnam gained independence, the Vietnamese government sought to reclaim Vietnamese history. Consequently, the Vietnamese government developed the National Museum of Vietnamese History, the National Museum of the Vietnamese Revolution, the Army Museum, and the Museum of the Viet Bac Autonomous Regions.[36]

The Museum of Vietnamese History was erected in 1958 after Vietnamese independence from France.[37] The goal of the Museum was to offer a locale for visitors to learn more about Vietnamese early history up until 1945 and to build a national identity.[38] Nguyen Thi Thu Huong explains that the, “The museum displays objects in such a way that it lets the objects “speak for themselves,” with minimum information about object names, dates, and materials, written in third person.”[39] In 2008, the museum finished its renovation and has displayed 89 Cham objects, which were excavated by French scholars between 1927 and 1934 in a special rotunda.[40] As such, the Cham collection is separated from other objects. However, Huong notes that Cham objects are still considered to be works of art by the Vietnamese.[41] In 2010, the Prime Minister of Vietnam, Nguyen Tan Dung, agreed on a new display for a new concept of the National Museum of History, which separates Cham history in two sections (from the second to the tenth century and from the tenth to the fifteenth century).[42] The goal of this project is to present Cham history as part of Vietnamese history, and therefore to view Cham objects not solely as artwork.

Cham Sculptures in Europe

Cham sculptures are also held at other sites outside present-day Vietnam, primarily in Europe. The Rietberg Museum in Switzerland is one such museum. Most of the Rietberg Museum’s collection was donated by the banker and collector, Freiherr (Baron) Eduard von der Heydt.[43] Heydt’s donated pieces were first excavated from one Cham sanctuary, Dong-du’o’ng in Vietnam, by French archaeologist Henri Parmentier in 1902. The sculptures made its way to Paris to an art dealer named Paul Mallon. Many of the same sculptures were later collected by Heydt and eventually donated to the Rietberg Museum. Other sculptures at the Rietberg Museum have been excavated from My Son, another Cham sanctuary in Vietnam. Sculptures from Dong Dong-du’o’ng and My Son have come to gain greater significance to the museum world because of the near destruction of these sites during the Vietnam War. It is also noted that many inscriptions of Cham sculptures have been lost due to numerous wars and “...the habit of the conquering Vietnamese to destroy all Cham inscriptions they could lay their hands on.”[44] Therefore, the sculptures standalone without any known content to describe its original meaning. This could be one reason why these sculptures are viewed as art pieces and treated as such, rather than sacred objects to be revered.

Another museum that has a large collection of Cham sculptures is the Guimet Museum of Asian Art (or Musée National des arts asiatiques Guimet) in Paris, France. The

Guimet Museum was established with the help of industrialist Emile Guimet, who the museum is named after. As a result of Guimet's travel across the world, he collected numerous objects from Egypt, Greece, Japan, China, and India. The objects were originally displayed at a different location in France in 1879 and later these objects were transferred to the Guimet Museum in 1889. In 1945, the Guimet Museum traded numerous Egyptian pieces to the Louvre and in exchange, received numerous Asian art pieces. As a result, by 1953 the Guimet Museum became the most prominent museum to hold Asian art. In 1996, it was renovated and according to the ASEMUS Asia-Europe Museum Network and the goal of the renovation,

... was to ensure that the institution founded by Emile Guimet can increasingly assert itself, in line with the efforts of all its previous Directors and curatorial staff, as a major centre, in the heart of Europe, for the appreciation and knowledge of Asian civilizations, while also taking into consideration the latest developments in museum science and new requirements for the display and conversation of artworks.
[45]

Jan Fontein also states that the Guimet Museum's collections "...are part of France's colonial heritage." [46] Both statements impress on the importance of Asian art to France's own cultural history. Between October 12, 2005 and February 6, 2006, the Guimet Museum held an exhibition titled "Art Treasures of Vietnam, Champa Sculpture," which was organized by the National Museums and the National Museum of Asian Art Guimet with help from Credit Agricole SA, Vietnam Airlines, and the House of Indochina. The exhibit

was initiated as a result of a sculpture restoration workshop at the Museum of Da Nang in Vietnam. It included ninety-six pieces from a number of sites including the Da Nang Museum, Ho Chi Minh City, My Son, Guimet Museum, and both Guimet Museum locations in Zurich and Lyon. [47] The Guimet Museum's permanent collection includes two sculptures, Vishnu Garudasana, which dates from the eighth to ninth century from My Son, and Shiva, which dates from the eleventh to twelfth century. [48][49] While both descriptions of the sculptures from the Guimet Museum website describe some information about their religious background, they are both also described as artwork, and therefore displayed as such.

Cham Sculptures in the United States

In an obscure locale for a Cham sculpture, in the Midwest at the Cleveland Museum of Art, are at least two sculptures from the Champa kingdom. The Aspara Bracket dated from the 900s was donated to the Cleveland Museum in 1990 by prominent dealer Robert H. Ellsworth. [50] Ellsworth was an avid collector of modern Chinese pieces including Chinese paintings, Ming dynasty furniture, and jade artwork. [51] He is said to have purchased whole collections of objects and sold them to other collectors and museums. It is also claimed that he sold fifteen pieces to the Cleveland Museum of Art. The Museum website states that items were donated, rather than sold, so this transaction still seems to be unclear.

Ellsworth did not graduate from high school, but was known to have been in “high-society circles” of which resulted in his prominent status as a collector. The New York Times even dubbed the name “king of Ming” for his extensive Chinese collection. Another Cham sculpture held at the Cleveland Museum is the Heraldic Lion, also dated from the tenth century. The piece was donated by collector and millionaire, Leonard C. Hanna, Jr., who served in the museum’s advisory committee in 1914, and in the accessions committee in 1920. [52] Both sculptures at the Cleveland Museum of Art are not on view and held in storage.

One of the few traveling exhibits that entered the United States was the “Arts of Ancient Viet Nam: From River Plain to Open Sea.” The exhibit was held at two locations: the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston from September 13, 2009 to January 3, 2010 and at the Asia Society and Museum in New York City from February 2 to May 2, 2010. In the exhibit catalogue, a statement from the General Director of the Department of Cultural Heritage, part of the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism in Vietnam, Dr. Dang Van Bai, includes the following message:

It is our belief that this project will deepen the American people’s understanding of the culture of Viet Nam and its important role in the history of Asia. Arts and culture have always provided a bridge to mutual understanding among the peoples of the world, and this project is a first important step toward that end. [53]

Similar to the importance of Cham cultural objects to French colonial history, this statement emphasizes the importance of

Cham cultural objects to Vietnamese cultural history. The exhibit covered a lengthy history of Vietnam including “Early Cultures” from the first millennium BCE to second century CE, the Fu Nan period, the kingdom of Champa period, and the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries. It borrowed from a number of museums including the Da Nang Museum, Dong Nai Museum, Fine Arts Museum in Ho Chi Minh City, Hue Royal Antiquities Museum, Long An Museum, Museum of Vietnamese History in Ho Chi Minh City, National Museum of Vietnamese History in Ha Noi, Thua Thien Hue Historical and Revolutionary Museum, and the Viet Nam National Fine Arts Museum.

The Tourist Gaze

In a study conducted at the Da Nang Museum, researchers Thu Thi Trinh and Chris Ryan surveyed 411 visitors to examine their satisfaction with their visit to the Museum. [54] Satisfaction was measured in terms of “...repeat visitation and loyalty.” [55] The study took place during a three-month period between October 2012 and February 2013. Through the study, it was found that the majority of the visitors were international visitors on vacation (or holiday): 18% of visitors were from Australia, 17% from the United Kingdom, 14% from France, and 10% from Germany. Only 20% of visitors were Vietnamese residents. [56] Additionally, for 85% of the international visitors it was their first trip to Vietnam and for 26% of Vietnamese visitors it was their first

visit to Da Nang. 38% of respondents were in tour groups and visited the museum as part of a tour package. The results of the study suggested that the visitors had high levels of satisfaction while visiting the Da Nang Museum. However, going beyond the scope of the study, the results revealed that only few visitors were from Vietnam. Additionally, the authors did not describe ethnicities of the visitors and only discussed visitor nationalities. Therefore, there was no clear evidence of ethnic Cham visitors being recorded in this study. The study proves to be focused on tourists instead of indigenous peoples whose objects are being presented in the Da Nang Museum.

Several years after the previous study, the same researchers, Thu Thi Trinh and Chris Ryan, conducted another study on the Da Nang Museum and My Son sanctuary in 2015. This study was qualitative and fifty-one in-depth interviews were performed with twenty international visitors and twenty-six domestic tourists. 80% of the visitors were driven to visit the My Son sanctuary and Da Nang Museum as a result of history lessons of the Vietnam War, rather than actually having an interest in Cham culture or artifacts. [57]

This study suggests that tourists derive satisfaction from an aesthetic experience of heritage places and this experience becomes interpreted as an authentic feeling further enhanced by a story of past bombing in the twentieth century, thereby reducing a psychological temporal distance for contemporary tourists. Furthermore, it appears that tourists seem to be sensitive, both subjectively and objectively, to aesthetic issues over restoration work and the nature of what constitutes authenticity. A positive relationship is thought to exist between a perception of authenticity and the level of satisfaction being

derived from the visit. Tourists serve as consumers in a marketplace of aesthetically pleasing experiences.[58]

While the article focused on perceptions of tourists, it does shed some light into issues of identity. For the Vietnamese (national) tourists who visit, there may be a sense of belonging as they learn more about their nation's past. For international tourists, there seems to be a sense of connectedness through spirituality because the site is viewed as religious. These feelings were even stronger when tourists had a tour guide escorting and teaching them about the various structures of the site. However, one issue that is disregarded in these articles and many others, is Cham identity. These Cham sculptures and the ways in which they are displayed depict an ancient history, which assumes that Cham people and culture are ancient, and therefore no longer living.

Tradition, Authenticity, and Cultural Revitalization

Similar to Cham people, other Native peoples are scrutinized by non-Native scholars who measure cultural identity and authenticity through ancient traditions. These non-Native scholars regard living Native peoples as inauthentic because they do not practice ancient traditions. For example, Jocelyn Linnekin boldly states that Native Hawaiian tradition is invented. Native Hawaiian traditions are described as “reflexive” as they are unknowingly constructed by its people.[59] Linnekin describes two types of

Native Hawaiian identity: rural and nationalist. Rural Native Hawaiians are described as constructing tradition, because they try to maintain their ancestral traditions, whereas the nationalist Native Hawaiians use tradition for their political gains. Although Linnekin explains, “Tradition is fluid; its content is redefined by each generation and its timelessness may be situationally constructed,” Linnekin argues that many Native Hawaiians are inauthentic because they are not performing traditional modes of living.[60] Similarly, anthropologist Roger Keesing contends that Native culture borrows so much from Western culture that it is difficult to determine what is the “real past.”[61] These non-Native scholars project an extreme, purist, reductionist view of Native tradition, culture, and identity in which there is no middle ground. The portrait that is painted depicts stereotypes of what a Native should be and disregards the humanness of Native peoples. To affix an image that must be met in order to claim Native identity is offensive and counterproductive to understanding Native cultures, especially when this message is presented from a non-Native person.

While some non-Native scholars point to the inauthenticity of Native peoples who do not practice age-old traditions or who have become “modern,” Native scholars challenge the concept of tradition as solely primordial. Many Native scholars note the dynamic nature of traditions and rebuke the idea that traditions are fixed. Joanne Barker suggests that Natives and traditions are “conditional, that

they are made meaningful and relevant again and again...”[62] In Barker’s *Native Acts: Law Recognition, and Cultural Authenticity*, she explains how many Native American tribal laws were changed to reflect the Christianized patriarchal narrative in United States law. “Traditional” laws were used to determine membership and disenrollment of many Native peoples, and used to bolster the power of some tribal leaders. Barker questions what is “traditional” because traditions and customs continue to change through time. James Clifford explains that Stuart Hall’s concept of articulation may be applied to understanding traditions, “...an articulated tradition is a kind of collective ‘voice,’ but always in this constructed, contingent sense.”[63] Since cultural forms continue to change, authenticity is not a primary concern. Barker also states,

In thinking about the relationship between Native traditions and Christianity, social formation suggests that Native cultures and identities are always in negotiation, transformation, change, and exchange and so never possess a moment of ‘authenticity.’[64]

An example of the transformative nature of culture can be viewed by Native musicians who have utilized music as a tool to revitalize culture and combat historical trauma. Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart, et. al explain that Native Americans suffer from historical trauma, which is defined as

...cumulative emotional and psychological wounding across generations, including the lifespan, which emanates from massive group trauma...[resulting in] emotional challenges such as depression, substance abuse, collective trauma exposure,

interpersonal losses and unresolved grief, and related problems...

[65]

Victoria Lindsay Levine explains that music revitalization is not just about restoring musical traditions, but also implementing and building new styles. Levine refutes what some scholars deem as the “final step” to assimilation and explains that, “Native American musical revitalization [is] an extension or reconstruction of traditional culture – a strategy for preserving cultural continuity instead of a harbinger of assimilation and cultural abandonment.”[66] Musical revitalization allows Native Americans to be actors and create their own sense of agency by shaping their own histories, rather than passively reacting to white culture. Levine explores three types of music revitalization from three Choctaw tribes in different locations. Revivalistic musical revitalization was present in the Choctaw people of Ardmore, Oklahoma; and two different forms of perpetuative musical revitalization were present in the Mississippi and Louisiana Choctaw peoples.

Levine explains that revivalistic musical revitalization is when “a repertory that had ceased to be performed is restored, with modifications that reflects the interests, needs, and tastes of the individuals involved.”[67] After forty years of silence and inactivity, the Choctaw people of Ardmore, Oklahoma engaged in revivalistic musical revitalization in the 1970s by enlivening their music and dance. Buster Ned and Adam Sampson “reshaped, reinterpreted, and redefined Choctaw musical culture” by restoring traditional music, but

also altering the position that the dances were displayed, thereby creating new meaning to the dances. They were able to change the duration, date and time of performances, wear uncustomary attire, and replace musical instruments they deemed more appropriate for their setting. Revivalistic musical revitalization offers the Choctaw people of Ardmore with the opportunity to modify traditional customs as they saw fit. Levine explains,

In perpetuative musical revitalization, a conscious, aggressive effort is made to perpetuate a current style or repertory, again with modifications that reflect the interests, needs, and tastes of the individuals involved....[it is] motivated by the need to assert a discrete ethnic identity in a multiethnic context.[68]

In order to showcase ethnic pride and bring awareness to the outside public, the Mississippi Choctaw wore customary clothing while performing customary ceremonial music and dances. Conversely, the Louisiana Choctaw did not perform customary music, but performed uncustomary pan-tribal music and dances until the 1940s. They displayed and strengthened their ethnic pride by merging with other southern tribes to form a pan-tribal identity.

Considering the updated cultural practices that other Native peoples have performed to revitalize their culture, I ask: How can living Cham people display their ethnic and indigenous pride through cultural revitalization while being bound to colonial views of their culture within the institutions of museums?

Decolonization and Implications

Cham sculptures seem to have similar experiences to Maori *taongas* (treasure) in that these objects are often viewed by museums as artwork, rather than sacred objects. The Maori people of New Zealand have struggled to gain cultural respect from various museums worldwide, but some Maori groups have been able to implement cultural protocols to their respective *taongas*. These attempts at following cultural Maori protocols are viewed as methods to decolonize museums with colonial histories. For the Cham, it is clear that these sculptures once had a religious or spiritual overtone as they depict many Hindu and Buddhist gods and deities. While the majority of Cham people today are Muslims and may not find these sculptures to be sacred, perhaps even blasphemous in the sense that there is an emphasis on polytheism, there are small Cham communities who still view these objects and sites, such as the My Son sanctuary, to be sacred.

The museums and exhibits presented in this paper can be viewed as monocultural in the sense that they homogenize Cham history with Vietnamese history. How, then, can these museums and exhibits that display Cham sculptures be decolonized? A solution that may be argued is to display objects in a multicultural framework by incorporating multiple cultures in museums. However, the problem with multiculturalism is that it again homogenizes ethnic groups and creates a divide between the dominant and minority groups. It can be argued that Vietnam's attempt to categorize their fifty-four ethnic groups comes from a multicultural

framework. It is because of this that I believe a bicultural approach could be applied to these exhibits and museums inside and outside present-day Vietnam. An attempt to clarify the distinctions between Cham and Vietnamese histories could then be made. Instead of Vietnam claiming Champa as part of their history, they could acknowledge that it is a significant history to the development of the Vietnamese nation, but distinct from it. This approach can also be applied to museums and exhibits outside of Vietnam as most displays are either referred to as related to the Champa kingdom or Vietnamese history. An acknowledgement of both histories is important in displaying an accurate and nuanced history of Vietnam and its predecessors.

An issue that may arise with the bicultural approach is that other ethnic minority groups (in Vietnam fifty-three, to be exact) may not be included. However, exhibits and museums that refer other to ethnic minority groups may also benefit from a bicultural approach in terms of representing that particular ethnic minority group in relation to the Vietnamese state. My point is that in order to specifically decolonize museums and exhibits in which Cham sculptures are displayed, museums must consider making a distinction between Cham and Vietnamese. While both groups may have borrowed some aspects of each other's culture, these two cultures are in fact different as the peoples have different languages and ways of living. To homogenize both cultures would discredit both cultures. When appropriate, these cultures may be displayed as sharing aspects of each other's

culture, but that does not mean that all of Cham culture should be displayed as Vietnamese culture or vice versa. Through a bicultural approach, museums may consult with Cham communities who still identify these sculptures as sacred. By doing so, the community members can offer more accurate meanings behind these sculptures and therefore, remove the label of artwork to these religious and spiritual objects. For the Cham who no longer practice Hinduism or Buddhism, there is equal importance to represent their stories as traditions change through time.

It is vital to remember that there is flexibility in interpreting Cham objects, and thereby Cham culture. For example, dates of objects may be unclear and information may not come from primary sources (the Cham) as information often relies on non-Cham sources. In the “Arts of Ancient Viet Nam: From River Plain to Open Sea” catalogue, it is noted that the primary sources of information came from inscriptions and accounts from Chinese and Vietnamese writings.^[69] Two sculptures from the “Arts of Ancient Viet Nam: From River Plain to Open Sea” exhibition are listed with uncertain origin dates. The first is listed as “Female”, which is a fragmented sculpture of a female figure, and is described as being dated between the fifth and tenth centuries.^[70] Another statue, listed as “Shiva”, is also unknown because the temple, My Son, where it was meant to be installed, was being renovated in the tenth century. Nonetheless, it was found in the rubble of the site. Interestingly, some scholars have placed “Shiva” in the eighth century due to the statue’s facial

features.^[71] Both statues are owned by the Da Nang Museum. Additionally, as previously mentioned, many inscriptions of sculptures at the Rietberg Museum were lost. Thus, it can be argued that data analyzed and provided by numerous Asian Studies and French scholars are hypothetical.

Conclusion

It is clear that Cham culture is appropriated by the French and Vietnamese through the display of Cham sculptures in their museums. Since Cham sculptures are viewed as beautiful, they are therefore perceived as artwork. By labeling Cham sculptures as art, it takes away their connection with the people who once viewed them or continue to view them as sacred or spiritual pieces. It is important to recognize that although the majority of living Cham people may not find these objects as sacred, there are still some Cham communities who view these objects as religious. Therefore, it is important to follow cultural protocols held by these smaller communities. When institutions such as museums do not recognize these contemporary living peoples as important contributors to the display of these cultural objects, they discount Cham people and culture. This indicates that institutions do not offer the full story to museum visitors.

While cultural objects in museums are ancient, it is important to emphasize that Cham people have survived and continue to live on today. As such, there should be attempts

by institutions to showcase contemporary Cham culture. This can be viewed through the attempts at cultural revitalization by contemporary Cham peoples through music in addition to other creative and visual elements. It is important to revive cultural history, but it is just as important to create new stories that reflect contemporary Cham peoples. Perhaps, another approach at decolonizing museums with Cham sculptures would be to bring in contemporary Cham artists to showcase their own works. This way, Cham peoples and cultures can be viewed as contemporary, rather than as ancient objects only viewable through glass cases in colonial museums.

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